

THE LAW OF GOD

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



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The Ten Commandments

Prologue 2 (Love of Neighbor)



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The Ten Commandments or Decalogue (10 words) was given by God on Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai) to Moses around 1280 BC. They are the core of the moral teachings of Israel and have come down to Christianity as part of Divine Revelation. The Church in commenting on the Commandments sees in them the totality of the negative and positive moral law, the things we should not do, as well as the things we should do. This is to say, they embody the entire natural law, what reason can discover of morality from the nature of the world and man. However, as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, not every society, much less every man, discovers the entire natural law, so God has revealed it in the Commandments so it could be known with certainty by all men, of every society, and every age.

The Bible gives two versions of the Ten Commandments, in essential content identical, one in Exodus and another in Deuteronomy. The enumeration of the commandments (which is number one, which is two etc.) are traditional and neither contained in the texts nor obvious. The Catholic Church has traditionally used the Deuteronomy account and followed the division of the text given in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Scriptures made by second century BC Jews in Egypt and used by the early Church as its Old Testament. The Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church also use this account. The other Reformation churches use the Exodus listing, and adopted the Jewish enumeration of the Hebrew text. The Commandments are probably best known from the traditional formulas used in catechesis.

Commentary is by Saint Thomas Aquinas. By universal consent, Thomas Aquinas is the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of divine revelation. He is one of the great teachers of the medieval Catholic Church, honored with the titles Doctor of the Church and Angelic Doctor.

Chapter 2 (Love of Neighbor)

When Christ was asked which is the greatest commandment, he gave two answers to the one question. The first was “You shall love the Lord your God,” which we have talked about. The second was “and your neighbor as yourself.” At this point we should point out that whoever observes this fulfills the whole law. The Apostle said (Rm 13:10): “The fulfilment of the law is love.”

Four motives for loving our neighbor

There are four motives for loving our neighbor: The **first** is divine love, since it is said (1 Jn 4:20): “If anyone says that he loves God, while he hates his brother, he is a liar.” For anyone who says he loves someone, while hating his son or his members, he is lying. But all of us faithful are sons and members of Christ. The Apostle says (1 Cor 12:27): “You are the body of Christ, and each of you a member of it.” Therefore anyone who hates his neighbor does not love God.

The **second** status is the winning of victory, something everyone naturally desires. Therefore either you should be good to the one who offended you so as to win him over to love you, and then you have won, or the other person should lead you to hate him, and then you have lost (Rm 12:21): “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The **third** status is gaining an advantage. In this way you acquire many friends (Rm 12:20): “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink. By so doing you pile up coals of fire on his head.” Augustine says, “There is no greater incentive to love than to love first. For no one is so hard that, even if he does not want to show love, he would refuse to repay it.” For it is said (Sir 6:15): “Nothing can compare with a faithful friend.” And (Prov 16:7): “When Yahweh is pleased with a man’s ways, even his enemies will be at peace with him.”

The **fourth** status is that by so doing your prayers will easily be heard. Thus, on the passage (Jer 15:1) “If Moses and Samuel stood before me,” Gregory says that he made special mention of them because they prayed for their enemies. Likewise Christ said (Lk 23:34): “Father, forgive them.” And blessed Stephen, by praying for his enemies, brought a great advantage to the Church, because this converted Paul.

The **fifth** status is the avoidance of sin, which we should desire very much. For sometimes we sin and don’t even look for God. Then God draws us to himself by sickness or something similar (Hos 2:6): “Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns.” Paul was also treated this way (Ps 118:176): “I wandered like a lost sheep. Look for your servant, Lord.” And (Sg 1:3): “Draw me after you.” We gain this if we draw our enemy after ourselves, first by forgiving him, for it is said (Lk 6:36): “By the measure you measure out, it shall be measured back to you.” and (Lk 6:37): “Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.” And (Mt 5:7): “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” And there is no greater mercy than to forgive one who has offended you.

End of prologue 2 (Love of Neighbor)

The **second** motive is the divine precept. For when Christ was going away, he stressed this commandment to his disciples above all other commandments, saying (Jn 15:12): “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” For no one is observing the divine commandments if he hates his neighbor. So the sign of observing the divine law is love of neighbor. So the Lord said (Jn 13:35): “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” He does not point to raising the dead or any other glaring sign, but this is the sign: “if you have love for one another.” The blessed John weighed this well when he said (1 Jn 3:14), “We know that we have been transferred from death to life.” Why? “Because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death.”

The **third** motive is our sharing in the same nature, as it is said (Sir 13:19): “Every animal loves its like.” Since all man are alike in nature, they should love one another. So to hate one’s neighbor is not only against the divine law, but also against the law of nature.

The **fourth** motive is the advantages it brings. For everything that one person has is useful to another through charity. For this is what unites the Church and makes everything common (Ps 118:63): “I am a companion of all who fear you and keep your precepts.”

Five requisites in loving our neighbor

So “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That is the second commandment of the Law, and it concerns love of neighbor. We have discussed the fact that we must love our neighbor. Now we must turn to the way we must love him, and that is indicated in the words “**as yourself**”. Regarding this, there are five points we must observe in loving our neighbor:

The **first** is that we must love him really as ourselves. We do this if we love him for his own sake, not because of our own interest. Here recall that there are three kinds of love. The **first** is utilitarian (Sir 6:10): “he is a friend at table, but will not be around on the day of need.” That is certainly not true love. It vanishes when the advantage vanishes. In that case we do not wish good for our neighbor, but rather our own advantage. There is **another love** directed at what is pleasurable. This too is not true love, because when the pleasure vanishes it vanishes. In that case we do not wish good primarily for our neighbor, but rather we want his good for ourselves. The **third** kind of love is for the sake of virtue, and only that is true love. For then we do not love our neighbor in view of our own good, but for his own good.

The **second** point is that we must love inordinately, that is, we must not love him above God or as much as God, but along with him in the way you

love yourself (Sg 2:4 Vulgate): “He ordered love in me.” The Lord taught this order (Mt 10:37): “Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter above me is not worthy of me.”

The **third** point is that we must love our neighbor in practice. For you do not only love yourself, but you also take care to provide for yourself and avoid evil. You must do the same for your neighbor (1 Jn 3:18): “Let us not love in words or with our tongue, but in deed and in truth.” But certainly the worst people are those who love with their mouth but do harm in their hearts. The Apostle says (Rm 12:9): “love without pretense”.

The **fourth** point is that we must persevere in loving our neighbor, just as you persevere in loving yourself (Prov 17:17): “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity;” that is, he loves in bad times as much as he does in good times. Moreover, a friend is really proven in a time of adversity.

But note that two things help preserve friendship. The **first** is patience: “A quarrelsome man enkindles strife,” as it is said (Prov 26:21). The **second** is humility, which causes the former, that is patience (Prov 13:10 Vulgate): “Among the proud there is always strife.” For anyone who thinks big about himself and despises another cannot endure the latter’s shortcomings.

The **fifth** point is that we must love with justice and holiness, so that we do not love to bring him to sin, because you should not love yourself that way, since by doing so you lose God. Thus it is said (Jn 15:9): “Remain in my love.” This is the love spoken of (Sir 24:24 Vulgate): “I am the mother of beautiful love.”

Loving sinners and hating sin

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” This precept the Jews and Pharisees badly understood, believing that God commanded them to love their friends and hate their enemies. Therefore, by “neighbors” they understood only friends. Christ meant to repudiate this understanding when he said (Mt 5:44): “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.” Note that whoever hates his brother is not in the state of salvation (1 Jn 2:9): “He who hates his brother is in the darkness.”

We must be aware, however, of texts to the contrary. For the saints hated some people (Ps 138:22): “I hated them with perfect hatred.” And in the Gospel (Lk 14:26): “If anyone does not hate his father and mother and wife and sons and brothers and sisters, even his own soul, he cannot be my disciple.” We should realize that in all that we do, what Christ did should be our example. For God loves and hates. In any man two things should be considered: **his nature** and **the wrong**. What is of nature in man should be loved, what is wrong should be hated. So if anyone wished a person to be in hell, he would be hating his nature, but if he wished him to be good, he would be hating the sin, which should always be hated (Ps 5:7): “You hate all who do evil.” And (Wis 11:25), “Lord, you love all that exists, and hate nothing which you have

made.” See, then, what God loves and hates: He loves what is of nature and hates what is wrong.

We should realize, however, that sometimes a person can do evil without sinning, that is, when he does evil so that he may desire good, because God also does this. For instance, when a man is sick and is converted to good, whereas while he was well he was evil. In the same way someone can be converted to good when he meets adversity, after being evil while living in prosperity, according to the text (Is 28:19): “Terror alone shall convey the message.” Another case is to desire the evil of a tyrant destroying the Church, in as much as you desire the good of the Church through the destruction of the tyrant; thus (2 Mac 1:17): “Blessed in every way be God who has punished the wicked.” And all must want this not just by willing it, but also by doing it. For it is not a sin to justly hang the evil; for they are ministers of God who do this, according to the Apostle (Rm 13), and these people are acting in love, because punishment is given at times to castigate evil, and at times for the sake of a greater and divine good. For the good of a city is a greater good than the life of one man. But note that it is not enough not to wish evil, but one must also wish good, that is the correction of the sinner and eternal life.

For someone can wish the good of another in two ways. **One** way is general, in so far as the person is a creature of God and is capable of partaking in eternal life. The **other** way is special, in so far as the person is a friend or companion. No one is excluded from a general love, for everyone should pray for everyone, and help anyone in extreme need. But you are not held to be familiar with everyone, unless he asks pardon, because then he would be your friend; and if you refused him you would be hating a friend. Thus it is said (Mt 6:14-15): “If you forgive people their sins, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive them, neither will your Father forgive you your sins.” And in the Lord’s Prayer it is said (Mt 6:9): “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Reasons for forgiving

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” It has been said that you sin if you do not forgive someone who asks for pardon. It is of perfection if you recall him to yourself, although you are not held to do this. But there are many reasons why you should bring him back to yourself. The **first** is to preserve your own status. For different statuses have different signs, and no one should throw off the sign of his own status. The highest status of all is to be a son of God. The sign of this status is to love your enemy (Mt 5:44-45): “Love your enemies, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” For if you love your friend, this is not a sign of divine son-ship, for even the Publicans and Gentiles do this, as it is said (Mt 5).